

The Poor Souls in Purgatory

Meditations for the Month of November



The Holy Trinity with Our Lady and Saint Michael interceding for the souls in Purgatory

Prayer for the Faithful Departed

O gentlest Heart of Jesus
ever present in the Blessed Sacrament,
ever consumed with burning love
for the poor captive souls in Purgatory,
have mercy on the soul of thy departed servant.
Be not severe in Thy Judgment
but let some drops of Thy Precious Blood
fall upon the devouring flames and
do Thou O merciful Saviour
send Thy angels to conduct Thy departed servant
to a place of refreshment, light and peace. Amen

Prayer of Saint Gertrude for the Souls in Purgatory

O Eternal Father, I offer Thee the Most Precious
Blood of Thy Divine Son, Jesus Christ, in union with
the Masses said throughout the world today, for all
the holy Souls in Purgatory, for sinners everywhere,
for sinners in the Universal Church, those in my own
home and within my family. Amen

May the souls of all the faithful departed through
the Mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen

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November 1st

The Saints in Heaven

I saw a great multitude which no man could number, standing before the throne, and in sight of the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and with palms in their hands. (Apoc. vii. 9)

*R*equiescant in pace [Rest in peace]. There is no need to offer this prayer for the Saints in Heaven, except by way of congratulation and of joy at the thought of their happiness. Their period of suffering is past; they rest in eternal peace, in the perfect possession of Him for whom they were created, and apart from whom man is ever restless and dissatisfied. To have peace with God; this is the joy of Heaven, and this alone can give us joy on earth.

*T*his countless multitude stand before the throne of God, and in sight of the Lamb. These are the two fountains of their joy. They are never weary of admiring the justice of God, His wisdom, power, majesty. They also drink in, as they behold the Sacred Humanity of the Lamb, an inexhaustible draught of love and gratitude. He is their King, their Saviour, their Lord, their Love. To gaze on His perfect beauty is, in itself, Paradise. No wonder then that they rest in peace.

*H*ow can the Saints endure the sight of the Divine glory? Are they not sinners all? Yes, all-- save God's Holy Mother. Or rather they were sinners all, but now they have washed their robes, and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb. This is the secret of true peace; sin forgiven, and a conscience pure and clean. We need not fear our past sins if we have, by heartfelt contrition, washed them away in the Blood of Jesus; but even here we may rest in peace. Pray that you may rest in peace in the love of God.

November 2nd

The Saints Waiting for Heaven

*R*equiescant in pace [Rest in peace]. On All Souls' Day we offer this prayer for those who are not only Saints, but Saints on the very threshold of Paradise, waiting to be admitted to the immediate presence of God. It is always a privilege to do a service to the friends of God; it is so, above all, when those who need our help will in a short time behold His Face in Heaven, and will gratefully remember for all eternity each little prayer offered in their behalf.

*T*hese Saints waiting for Heaven cry out to us to help them. They have a claim on us by reason of the intensity of their suffering. No words can tell all that they suffer, and their very love of God increases their pain. Every compassionate heart will desire to do something to relieve them, and to shorten the time of their banishment. Yet how little I do for them!

*T*hey are, moreover, unable to help themselves. We always feel a more tender sympathy for those who cannot move a finger to relieve their own sufferings. Their helplessness appeals to our generosity. If we saw one, whom we knew to be a Saint, enduring some affliction in which he could do nothing in his own behalf, we should be eager to assist him. The Holy Souls are utterly helpless; their own prayers avail them nothing. To us they look for aid, for an abridgment of their time of punishment. Do I respond to their appeal as I ought? Endeavor to increase in sympathy for the Souls in Purgatory.

November 3rd

The Holiness of the Souls in Purgatory

Every soul in Purgatory, before coming there, appears before the judgment seat of Christ and there recognizes its state before God, and (as many theologians tell us) makes an act of perfect contrition and fervent love, by which all the guilt of sin still attaching to it is removed. It is, as far as its own intrinsic condition is concerned, ready to appear in the immediate presence of God, and to enjoy the Beatific Vision forever. O happy souls that die in a state of grace, and are united to God by bonds that no power on earth or Hell can sever!

This act of perfect contrition also implies a detestation of all venial sin, and of anything that interferes with the pure love of God. But it does not remove the debt that still has to be paid. It is rather the very intensity of the act of contrition that will make the soul long to do penance, and cause it to rejoice in being buried in Purgatory until the justice of God is satisfied. How differently I shall then view my sins! How I shall loathe and detest the folly that led me to prefer to the will of God what was hateful in itself, and more hateful still by reason of the Divine prohibition!

These Holy Souls will, however, gain no merit by their act of contrition and love. They will indeed receive the assistance of actual grace in proportion to the degree of sanctifying grace in which they died, but their co-operation with it will not add to their glory in Heaven, or shorten their Purgatory. After death, no redemption; no power to shake off the temporal punishment of a single sin. Pray that you may lose no opportunity of merit while on earth.

November 4th

The Difficulty of Purgatory

*T*hese souls waiting for Heaven are then, one and all, holy. No spot of sin, no attachment to sin, no imperfection dwells within them. They love God with all the force of their regenerate nature, and God loves them with the fondest affection. They are to be His friends and companions forever. The throne in Heaven is ready for each of them, and nothing can deprive them of it. The Saints and Angels are longing for their company, yet they cannot enter Heaven. How strange it seems! What holds them back in their spotless purity from the bosom of their God?

*T*hey, moreover, long after God with the most intense longing; they have no attachment to any sort of sin; they do not cling to any creature with a love which interferes with their love of God. Why is not the door of Heaven open to them? Why are they kept waiting so long? They have done all they can. They have united themselves to Him by a perfect act of sorrow and love. Yet God, in His hatred of their past sins, keeps them in a place of banishment. How God must hate sin!

*A*ll their sufferings will not add anything to their future glory. However patient they may be, they will gain nothing by their willing endurance. Why then does not God, the All-merciful God, take them at once to Heaven? We can understand that those who hate God are necessarily separated from Him, but why those who love Him, if they gain nothing by it? How God must hate sin, if He thus punishes it in the case of those who have nothing in them save the purity of perfect love! Seek to realize more the utter hatefulness of sin.

November 5th

The Reason of Purgatory

The doctrine of Purgatory is like all the teaching of the Church, perfectly reasonable. There are many good men and women, loving God above all things, who have often made good acts of contrition for their past sins, but they are nevertheless still very imperfect. It would be strange if they who commit many daily faults, of which some are deliberate and are done with a full knowledge that they displease God, should at once take their place in the company of the Saints. It would jar upon our ideas of what is required by the holiness and majesty of God.

Most men have never had a sorrow for sin corresponding to its true character. It has not been, in any wise, equivalent to the malice of sin, or the insult offered by it to Almighty God. They have paid but a very small portion of the debt due, and though Our Lord's merits are of infinite value, yet: they have not availed themselves of them as they might. The remainder of this debt must be paid before the justice of God is satisfied.

Most men up to the end of their lives are still attached to some fault or imperfection displeasing to God. They know it is not a serious sin and, therefore, they think too lightly of it, and do not make the efforts they might to overcome it. When death comes, they see it in its true light, and are pierced with sorrow and dismay and hatred of themselves, and a desire to make satisfaction to God by suffering the penalty of their sin. Ask yourself whether you have reason to fear on any of these counts.

November 6th

The Justice of Purgatory

Every mortal sin has an intensity of evil that cannot be measured, inasmuch as it is a deliberate and willful offence against a God of infinite holiness, Our Lord, by the satisfaction of infinite value He offered for sin, saved us from the eternal punishment which is incurred by each mortal sin. But the Divine justice requires, on our part, that we should suffer in some way a penalty that at least reflects in its intensity something of the intensity of the evil of mortal sin. Either in this life or in Purgatory, man must expiate each single sin committed.

Venial sin has also in it an intensity of evil that we do not understand. It is a greater evil than all the physical evil, all the misery, all the pain in the whole world. We too often overlook venial sin in our acts of contrition; we forget its baseness, meanness, treachery. Our hands are not clean when we appear before God, and we do not trouble ourselves to cleanse them. Hence, we have to be cleansed in the searching fires of Purgatory, that God's justice may be vindicated.

How few there are who, when they come to die, have learned to hate sin as those must who are to appear before God in Heaven. They still cling to the things of earth, and prefer them in some way to that which they know God desires of them, "O Death!" says the Wise Man, "how terrible thou art to the man who has peace in his possessions." For such an one there is also a terrible Purgatory, for this sort of peace is sure to involve many venial sins that have passed almost unnoticed. Pray for a wholesome fear of the just judgments of God.

November 7th

Purgatory under the Old Law

*I*t is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from their sins (2 Mach. xii. 46). These words of Holy Scripture, approving the custom of praying for the dead, that they may be loosed from their sins, implies that they are bound by sin in a prison-house, from which one day they will be released. The phrase would be meaningless were there no Purgatory. Even apart from inspiration, the passage bears witness to the prevalent belief of the whole Jewish people. If they were so much impressed with the fear of the sufferings of Purgatory, and ready to help those imprisoned there, how much more should I?

*T*he sacred writer commends the piety of Judas Maccabeus, who collected a large sum of money to have sacrifices offered for the sins of those who had died in battle. His charity was very pleasing to God. Amid the distresses and anxieties of the war in which he was engaged with the enemies of God, he did not forget the holy dead. What a firm belief he must have had in Purgatory! What a vivid realization of the needs of those who suffer there! Yet, I too often seem to forget the very existence of Purgatory and of those who suffer there!

*J*udas recognized the duty of special prayers and sacrifices for our own countrymen and friends; for those whom we have known and with whom we have associated on earth. Surely if he had this zeal, I, a child of the Church, ought to do more than I do for my friends, acquaintances, and benefactors. Pray for more devotion to those who have a special claim on you.

November 8th

Purgatory under the New Law

*T*hough Our Lord brought fresh graces without number, and privileges without end, which made the path to Heaven easier to find, yet at the same time those additional graces involved additional responsibility for those on whom they were bestowed. Under the light of the Gospel, with the sight of Christ crucified before them, with all the privileges of the Church, their venial sins were far worse than those of the Jews and Pagans. Do I ever remember all that Christ has done for me, and think how it increases my guilt?

*T*he punishment of sins committed by Christians will be far heavier than that of those committed by non-Christians. He that knew his Lord's will and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes. The fire shall try every man's work, and it will indeed be a searching, penetrating fire. Just in proportion to the light and grace given will be the punishment for refusing it. When I think of the clear light and strong grace I have enjoyed, what must I expect?

*T*hat which makes sin so grievous now, is that it is not only an offense against God, but an act of unkindness and ingratitude to Jesus Christ. It basely returns Him evil for His love towards us. God treated far more leniently those who lived in days of ignorance when He had not revealed Himself in His Son. Now, He calls on us all to do penance in this life, else we shall have to do a terrible penance hereafter. Pray for a conviction of the evil of sin, as an insult to Him who died on the Cross to save us from our sins.

November 9th

The Punishments of Purgatory

Every punishment that God sends in this life upon sin has a double object: to satisfy His justice, and to bring about the reformation of the offenders. God always has in view the salutary effects of the punishment on him who suffers it, and, for this purpose He gives a grace to enable him to use it aright. Through the Divine mercy, the very punishment of our sins may thus promote our happiness here and our glory in Heaven.

It is not so with the punishment of Purgatory. It is purely a poena vindicative [retributive punishment] a penalty which has for its object the reparation, as far as may be, of the outrage offered to the majesty of God by sin. It is this which gives it its character of awful severity. The sinner has no opportunity of making good use of it to learn a lesson for the future. He has not the consolation of knowing he can turn it into a source of heavenly joy. It must simply be endured as long as God shall please, and at the end will have produced no fruit of additional glory in Heaven for ourselves.

The punishment of Purgatory, moreover, does not, for the most part, follow close on the offences of which it is the penalty. God waits and this always means a heavier and more terrible penalty. In the days of the Flood, He waited one hundred and twenty years: so God waits to see whether the sinner will expiate in this life the sins for which temporal punishment still remains. He gives him the graces necessary, and if these are neglected, God takes into His own hands the vindication of His majesty. What reason have I to fear God's terrible wrath for my sins? Ask for the privilege of atoning for your sins in this life.

November 10th

The Employment of Purgatory

The one continual occupation of the Holy Souls in Purgatory will be to suffer. There will be the dull monotony of constant suffering. No light from Heaven to cheer them in their anguish, no pleasant sights to see, no sweet sounds to hear, nothing but the passive endurance of unceasing pain. How tediously will the hours and days pass away! Nothing makes the time seem so long as the gnawing of ceaseless pain, the absence of all that cheers and makes existence bright.

Will the Holy Souls in Purgatory be able to pray? Yes, in so far as prayer is the expression of a longing desire for that which we have not. But they will not gain any merit from their prayers; there will be none of the consolations, nothing of the happiness of prayer. Their entreaties to be relieved will receive no answer from their God save that which is conveyed in Our Lord's words: "I tell thee, thou canst not go out thence till thou hast paid the very last farthing." How foolish shall I be if I neglect, prayer here, and so have to pray for long years the fruitless prayers of Purgatory!

Will the Holy Souls praise God? Yes; by the painful process of their suffering they will glorify the justice of God. But in this praise there will not be the element of joy that always enters into praise in Heaven and on earth. It will be the acknowledgment of God's justice: "We have sinned, and done wickedly; therefore is this anguish come upon us." If I am wise, I shall seek to anticipate this joyless praise by thanking God not only for the happiness of my life, but, also, for its sorrows and chastisements. Learn to employ your time better in this life.

November 11th

The Meditations of the Souls in Purgatory

The Holy Souls will mourn and lament over their blindness and folly in accepting the miserable satisfaction of the transitory pleasures of earth at the cost of the separation from God and the physical torment that is their due. "Fools that we were!" they will cry out, "All the pleasures of our past life are not worth mentioning in comparison with the pain of one hour, nay, of one moment in Purgatory. They were but a shadow that passed by, the remembrance of them does but add to our suffering."

"Fools that we were!" they will again cry out, "We did not accept with resignation the sorrows and trials of earth. By our impatience, our murmuring, our discontent, we only made ourselves more miserable, and, for this very misery, added to our lot on earth by our own folly, we are suffering now far greater misery in these torturing flames, and by our separation from Him Who is the source of all happiness and all joy."

"Fools that we were! We might have turned all those sufferings into happiness, if we had used them as we ought. We might have lightened them, and made them comparatively easy to bear, if we had been resigned to the holy will of God; nay, we might have earned merit from each and all, and learned willingly and of our own accord that lesson of patience that here we learn, willingly, indeed, but nevertheless painfully, and as a just penalty of our impatience." Reflect what will be to you the chief cause of suffering when you come to Purgatory? Pleasures wrongfully indulged? Or self-love? Or sufferings badly borne?

November 12th

Some Further Meditations of the Souls in Purgatory

*T*here are other thoughts still more painful, which will be continually present to the Holy Souls. "If we had used our time on earth more prudently, we might have avoided our Purgatory altogether. How often the whispers of God's grace suggested to us some pious work, some deed of charity to others, some little sacrifice of present comfort for the sake of helping those in need, some mortification of our senses, a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, the devotion of some portion of time to prayer or spiritual reading! If we had only listened and obeyed, we should be in Heaven now instead of in the agony of the tormenting fire." Am I obedient to such daily inspirations?

"If we had taken all the means in our power to atone while on earth for sins already committed, we might have anticipated a part or perhaps the whole, of our Purgatory. But we were satisfied with confessing our sins, and so getting rid of the guilt; and then we thought that we had done all that was necessary, instead of making frequent acts of contrition, and performing penances and good works with the object of freeing ourselves from the punishment still due."

"How generous God would have been to us in remitting the penalty still remaining, if we had shown an anxiety to do our part in freeing ourselves from the debt that still had to be paid. How liberal He would have been in rewarding each prayer, each aspiration, each kind word or thoughtful act! Fools that we were to prefer our own will, comfort, ease, to the holy will of God!" See what you can do to expiate past sins.

November 13th

The Sorrows of Purgatory

What is it that will cause the chief sorrows of Purgatory? Above all and before all, the Holy Souls will sorrow at the thought of their having ventured to offend that God whom they love with every power of their soul, and whose Love eclipses all other love. "How could we have dared to offend a God so holy, a God so loving, a God of infinite power, glory, and majesty?" They will hate and loathe themselves at the thought, and would gladly endure their physical pain multiplied a thousand-fold, if only they could be rid of the gnawing pain at the thought of their having sinned against God.

They will also sorrow at the thought of the happiness they have lost to all eternity. They will appreciate the immeasurable loss that they will suffer through all eternity for each venial sin, for each deliberate neglect of grace. On earth they never appreciated, as they do now, how it would have been better to accept any temporal anguish rather than lose one single degree of glory in Heaven; but now they are cut to the heart at thinking how they have thrown away, not one degree alone, but countless degrees of the happiness after which they long; all this thrown away irreparably and forever!

This sorrow swallows up their present suffering; or rather they would willingly endure their present suffering for ten thousand years more, if only they could regain the degree of happiness they have forfeited. What is any temporal pain compared with an eternal loss? And a loss, too, which means a certain loss of God and loss of Heaven-- and that forever. Pray for greater sorrow now, and a sorrow that may avert the sorrow of Purgatory.

November 14th

The Fire of Purgatory

Every work of God is perfect in its kind, and that which He does immediately by the exercise of His Divine power has always a greater force than that which He does through the agency of others. God Himself kindles the fire of Purgatory. "The breath of the Lord, like a flame of fire, doth kindle it." Hence the fierceness of the torment it inflicts. It tortures the soul in Purgatory far more than the material fire of earth tortures the body. It reflects in some way the Infinite Majesty of God.

According to St. Augustine, the fire of Purgatory is of the same kind as the fire of Hell. Venerable Bede narrates how one, who was conducted by an angel in a vision to Purgatory, thought that such a place could be none other than Hell. In Purgatory, it is true, there is none of the despair of Hell. The Holy Souls have Heaven in prospect, but nevertheless their physical sufferings are scarcely different in kind from the awful agony of the lake of fire. How should I dread Purgatory!

The fire of Purgatory will search us through and through. It will be a penetrating fire; it will find out each fault still clinging to our soul at the hour of death; each stain not yet washed away by our tears of contrition will be burnt away before we can escape from our prison-house. When I think of the state of my soul before God, of my past sins and present defects, what reason I have to tremble at the thought of that crucible where the dross will be burnt from me. What a long process it will be! Pray that you may be more earnest in cleansing yourself from sin now.

November 15th

The Pain of Sense in Purgatory

The pain of Purgatory is the penalty of sin, and sin is a greater evil than all the other evils of the whole world. Even the least venial sin deliberately committed, is a worse evil than all the physical misery men have endured from the Creation until now. Hence, the corresponding punishment must involve greater suffering than any earthly anguish. Some have even maintained that the lightest suffering in Purgatory is more intolerable than the worst suffering on earth, and this opinion has in its favor the authority of St. Thomas himself. What reason, then, have I to dread Purgatory and seek to atone for sin now!

The physical pain that the soul suffers in this life is dulled, in that it comes through the medium of the corruptible body, but in Purgatory it directly and immediately affects the soul. Hence, it comes with far greater intensity, inasmuch as the soul is the root and spring of all sensibility. It will be more closely in contact with the fire, and at the same time the fire will be endowed with a power to torture it with misery far worse than the utmost pangs which can be inflicted when the body intervenes.

The pain that we suffer in this life has necessarily a limit by means of the weakness of the body. Men faint away under extreme torture. But in Purgatory the soul, freed from the body, will have no such limit fixed to its agony; its power of endurance will be in proportion to the suffering it has deserved. How can I avoid this awful agony that threatens me? Cultivate a love of mortification now, and a hatred of any unlawful indulgence of the body.

November 16th

The Pain of Loss in Purgatory

The pain of loss arises from the separation to the Holy Souls from God. In losing God, they lose everything that can satisfy the higher faculties of the soul. For one instant they have seen face to face the glory of God as reflected in the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ, and from that moment they long after Him with all the force of their spiritual nature. The consciousness that there is a barrier that separates them from Him whom alone they love, and after whom they crave unceasingly, is to them an agony far worse than that of the tormenting flames.

In this life men scarcely feel the absence of God, because there are a thousand external things that distract them. But in Purgatory there will be nothing to occupy the intellect and the will, nothing but the blackness of darkness and the hungry yearning of the heart, that will have nothing to feed upon, no one on whom to pour out the treasures of its love, nothing for the mind to dwell upon save its own misery, the unspeakable misery of being deprived of God. O my God, grant that I may never be separated from Thee!

Even here we know the agony that is caused by the unsatisfied craving for mere earthly love. Men who are separated from the object of their love seem able to find no happiness or consolation in aught else. The intensity of their misery sometimes drives them to madness, to suicide. Yet their agony is but a trifle compared with the agony of the Holy Souls deprived of God. How gladly they would suffer any physical torments for one ray of light from the throne of God! Pray for an appreciation of what it is to love God.

November 17th

The Degrees of Pain in Purgatory

The pain of sense and the pain of loss have each of them an almost indefinite number of degrees. The pain of sense varies in proportion to the indulgence of the senses on earth, and the knowledge possessed of the sinfulness of this indulgence. All the advantages and graces that they have received will but add to their punishment, in as far as they have willfully thrown away those golden opportunities of self-conquest.

The pain of loss, too, will vary according to the degree of holiness which was within their reach. All will experience their greatest suffering from the loss of God, but with some the loss, however great in itself; will be felt far less sensibly. It is those who were called to a high sanctity, to whom God revealed Himself with a special intimacy of love on earth, who will appreciate most intensely the misery of separation from Him. What reason then I have to tremble!

Each of these two kinds of pain will gradually be assuaged as time goes on. They will be worst at first, and will diminish little by little as the debt to be paid becomes lighter. This mitigation will be hastened on by the prayers and good works offered for the Holy Souls on earth, by the supplications of the Church, and above all, by the Sacrifice of the Mass. How much we may do for those who are suffering for their sins! Pray that you may earn a speedy relief.

November 18th

Our Kinsfolk in Purgatory

*M*ost of us have some who are related to us by blood still suffering in the Purgatorial fire, father or mother, brother or sister, some other kinsmen perhaps more closely connected with us. All these have a special claim upon us. They are bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. To neglect them is very cruel; as it would be to neglect those of our family, who are suffering on earth in some way we could easily relieve. Might I not do more for my relations who are still in need of my help?

*W*e all shrink from unnatural cruelty: a son who neglects his mother in her need; a parent who leaves his child in misery. There is a sort of unnatural cruelty in neglecting those to whom we owe much, and whom God has in some way entrusted to us. They are now dependent on us, stretching out their hands for spiritual alms, for Masses, Prayers, and Indulgences. I might so easily do more--why do I not do it?

*W*e read in the parable of Dives how he dreaded the presence of his brethren in the place where he was in torments. This will also be the case in Purgatory. How bitter it will be to us to know that there are some closely united to us by blood, who are also there through our fault or neglect! If we had shown charity to them in this life, they might long ago have been in Heaven, praying for our deliverance. Instead of that, our Purgatory will be prolonged for our unkindness to them, and will be intensified by self-reproach. God will treat us as we have treated them. Think of your suffering relations and beware of neglecting them.

November 19th

Our Friends and Acquaintances in Purgatory

Of all those with whom we have been connected by some tie of friendship or affection, of companionship, or common occupation, or business, how many there must be who are now in Purgatory! Most of them have some sort of claim on us. Some have been entrusted to our care; others have been influenced by our example; others have claims on our gratitude; others have in some way helped us on our way to Heaven. To all these we should seek to hold out a hand during their time of suffering.

There is one class in Purgatory whom we are bound to help. In the course of our lives we have done much harm and little good. The harm we have done has had an evil influence on others; perhaps we have led them into sin by our bad example. We might have done so much by the holiness of our lives to make them love God, and we have done so little! Will there not be many whose time in Purgatory will be much longer than it would have been if I had only lived up to a higher standard?

There are also many in Purgatory who have commended themselves to our prayers or been commended to us after their death; we have promised to pray for them, yet we have done little or nothing for them. How unkind they must think us to have forgotten them! In our thoughtlessness we have lost an opportunity of charity that would have won for us their grateful thanks for all eternity. Examine yourself as to whether you owe help to any in Purgatory by reason of either: (1) your bad example, (2) your neglect of duty to them when alive, (3) your neglect of your promise to help them after death.

November 20th

The Happiness of Purgatory

*T*he happiness of Purgatory is a happiness of prospect, not of actual enjoyment. It is in spe [hope] and not in re: hoped for, not already possessed. But the hope is something more than hope; it is a certain expectation which the Holy Souls know cannot be disappointed. This is their support and strength, their joy and consolation, amid their unspeakable anguish. They can look forward to the long years of eternal bliss when they will repose in the bosom of God. O happy prospect, to us always uncertain, so certain to those Holy Souls!

*H*appiness consists in union with God. If the soul is united to God by supernatural charity, beneath every kind of sorrow and misery there is an underlying joy. Now the Holy Souls are perfect in their charity. They have made an act of fervent charity at their judgment, and the habit of charity is in them as strong as ever. Hence, in spite of all their sufferings they are intensely happy, and cry out, "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

*H*appiness is not incompatible with intense suffering. A man may be lighthearted while he is shrieking with physical pain; he may be lighthearted even when separated from one whom he loves better than all else in the world. He is happy by reason of his internal dispositions, and in spite of the bitterness of the separation or the fierceness of the physical pain. So it is with most Holy Souls. Their dispositions are perfect, there will is God's. They are full of hope and love, how then can they fail to be happy? Pray for an unceasing union with God by charity.

November 21st

The Alleviations of Purgatory

Our Lord does not forget the souls that He loves. As at the time of His death He visited Limbo, so He from time to time manifests Himself to the Holy Souls in Purgatory, to comfort and cheer them. What a day of joy must it be for the Holy Souls when their Lord and King vouchsafes, if it be but for a moment, to illumine the dark prison-house with the light of His Divine presence. How they must sigh after Him when He departs, for what joy is there like the joy that comes of the presence of Jesus?

Our Lady, too, comes also with the same merciful design, especially on a Saturday, on her great feasts, and above all, on the feast of the Assumption, when she releases not a few Holy Souls every year, and carries them with her to Heaven. What a delight it must be to them to be thus comforted by the Holy Mother of God! How they must rejoice in having gained this privilege by their devotion to her while they were yet alive!

The Angels, too, are often sent by God to assuage the pains of the suffering souls. Our Lord does not forget the Angel who consoled Him during His Sacred Agony, when He took upon Himself the intolerable weight of the sins of the whole world; and He knows what it is to be suffering for sin that has no hold on the soul, but nevertheless drags it down, like some heavy weight attached to it by the Divine justice. Hence, there are Angels appointed to comfort the Holy Souls, to refresh them amid the devouring flames. Ask your Guardian Angel never to let you fall into sin, that so you may not need his help after life is done.

November 22nd

How to Avoid Purgatory

There are few who might not avoid Purgatory if they were only willing to adopt the requisite means. These means are:

1. A spirit of charity to others, and of self-denying charity. Charity shall hide a multitude of sins, and it will hide them in such a way that they shall be entirely blotted out, leaving behind them no debt of punishment still due. Our Lord has promised that what measure we mete out to others, the same shall be measured to us again. If we mete out to others a perfect charity. God will mete out to us a complete remission of our sins in the particular judgment without a trace of penalties to be suffered in the flames of Purgatory.

2. A spirit of great generosity to the poor for Christ's sake. God is always generous to those who deal generously with others; and almsgiving carries with it wonderful rewards. There appears to be an allusion to Purgatory in the words of Holy Scripture that alms deliver the almsgiver from sin, and will not suffer the soul to go into darkness; and in the precept, "Give alms of thy goods, and never turn away thy face from any poor man, so shall not the face of the Lord be turned away from thee." Am I really generous to the poor?

3. A spirit of great compassion for the suffering souls who are now in Purgatory. If we desire to escape Purgatory, we must help to pay the debt of others. We must aid many on the road to Heaven, if we desire to travel the same road without being detained on the way. Here, too. God will deal with us as we have dealt with others. What do I do for the Holy Souls? Pray God to teach you how to avoid Purgatory?

November 23rd

Other Means of Avoiding Purgatory

A great devotion to the Sacred Passion of Christ is one of the surest methods of escaping the penalty due to our sins. He is always touched by any compassion shown Him in His sacred sufferings. He is said to have revealed to one of the Saints that He would remit the temporal punishment due after death to anyone who for fifteen years should say every day seven Paters, seven Aves, and one Gloria in honor of His Sacred Passion. It seems very likely that such perseverance in honoring Him in what He suffered for us would exempt from Purgatory altogether. What do I do in this respect?

We may also hope to avoid Purgatory if we pray God to give us our Purgatory in this life. It requires some courage to do so, as, if God hears our prayer, we must expect to suffer greatly before we die, and perhaps to spend our lives in intense pain. How small will be the price paid in comparison with the advantage gained! All the sufferings of this life are small compared with the sufferings after death; and, moreover, here we can merit, we can go on increasing our eternal reward, but not in Purgatory.

Purity of intention in all our actions is another of the most efficacious means of attaining the same end. Anyone who does all his actions purely for God's sake will have nothing for the searching fire to lay hold of. It is self that has to be burnt out of us; self-will, self-love, self-indulgence. He who is rid of these may hope to go straight to Heaven. Pray that by one or all of these means you may avoid separation from God after your death.

November 24th

How to Shorten Our Purgatory

*M*ost of us cannot hope to escape altogether from the cleansing fires, but we all desire to render our sojourn there as short as possible. There are many means of doing this. All the means already mentioned for escaping altogether, will help to lessen our time of waiting; especially compassion for the Holy Souls. They will not, when they attain to the vision of God, forget those who have done anything to help them. Yet how little we do! And how bitterly we shall one day regret that we have not done more!

*A*nother certain way of shortening our Purgatory is devotion to the Holy Mother of God. She, the Mother of mercy and compassion, has a special compassion for the suffering souls; and she, the most grateful of all the beings that God has ever created, will be speedy to relieve and to deliver those who were devout to her upon earth. Each prayer we say, each aspiration we make, each little invocation we repeat in her honor, will gain for us help when help will be sorely needed. Cannot you do something more in honor of Mary?

*W*e can also pay part of the debt due to God by means of Indulged Prayers. To certain prayers and good works the Church attaches the remission of a certain amount of suffering; and she is most generous in furnishing us with the means of paying off the debt before we die. How we shall rejoice over each such prayer, when we come to experience the deliverance it has gained for us! Ask of God that, if you have to pass through Purgatory, at least your time may be short.

November 25th

The Allotment of Suffrages in Purgatory

Everything done to help any of the Holy Souls brings some sort of relief to the soul for whom it is offered. But the amount of relief we do not know; it depends on the will of God, and the merits of the individual. A Mass offered for one person may deliver him altogether; for another it may have the effect merely of a drop of water to cool his tongue in the burning flames, or of a breath of cool air amid the furnace of fire. On our life now will depend our speedy relief and deliverance from Purgatory, still more than on the prayers offered for us then.

The potency of the prayers and Masses offered for us, will depend, in a great measure upon what we do now to please God. If we help others now, we shall then have many to help us. A rich man who has been stingy during life, but leaves a large sum of money for Masses to be said for him, will indeed derive some benefit from them, but it may be that God will bestow the great proportion of the satisfaction on some poor man who has been generous and charitable to others during life. The rich man may wait for long years, and the poor man, who had no money to leave, may be delivered at once. Learn then to be generous now.

The satisfactory value of every Mass, though it is in itself infinite, is not infinite as applied to the individual. It is limited by the will of God and the dispositions of man. God looks upon the merits of His Son, and accepts them for that soul in proportion to its conformity to the likeness of Christ before its death. We must seek to be humble and meek of heart as Christ was, if His merits are to avail us then. Pray for more grace and love, now.

November 26th

The Retributions of Purgatory

God's way is to punish in kind. This law holds in Purgatory as in most other penalties that God inflicts. Those who have pampered their bodies will suffer an exceeding great physical torment. Each sinful indulgence of the body will add to the fierceness of the scorching flames. The intemperate and glutton will suffer a parching thirst and gnawing hunger; the luxurious will be plunged into a cauldron, as it were, of boiling metal, and endure an agony, one moment of which will more than out-balance all the delights of earth. Have I reason to fear in this respect?

Those who have chosen to follow their own will instead of the will of God, who have been proud and ambitious, and rebellious against God, will have far worse things to suffer. The God whom they have forgotten will in His turn forget them; and in the agony of their remorse, they will lament the folly and the sin that has left them in the blackness of darkness. If without self-will there be no Hell, it is also true that without self-will there would be no Purgatory.

Those who have neglected to help the Holy Souls during life will be neglected in their turn. Somehow, others will forget to pray for them, or if Masses and prayers are offered for them, God will transfer the main benefit of these to others. Everyone who goes to Purgatory will lament his want of generosity to others while he had a chance of helping them. Slow, indeed, will be the release of those who did little or nothing for the release of others. Try to anticipate the punishments in kind by 1. Mortification; 2. Submission; 3. Charity to others.

November 27th

The Duration of Purgatory

Purgatory will continue until the Day of Judgment. There will be some there still, who have been expiating their sins in dreadful torments for long years, perhaps for centuries. We read in the revelations of the Saints, of men being condemned to suffer the torment of fire as long as the world shall last. The Church, in sanctioning Masses in perpetuity, favors this opinion. At all events, fifty, or one hundred, or one thousand years, will be the extent of the time that some will have to endure the penalty of sins committed during their life. Shall not I have to expect a long Purgatory?

No time on earth will appear a hundredth part as long as the long tedious hours in Purgatory. Those who have been there but for a day have complained that they had been left there for a hundred years or more; a few moments seem like months. We little know what we are preparing for ourselves when we commit venial sins, or what is in store for us by reason of our imperfect atonement for past sins.

Each soul that appears before God at the particular judgment with sin imperfectly atoned for will be condemned to a certain period of Purgatory, a fixed number of days, or weeks, or months, or years, as the case may be. But the time may be shortened by the prayers and suffrages of those on earth and in Heaven. God will provide relief for those who have relieved others, but those, who have neglected the suffering souls, will in their turn be left to work out their time of suffering unaided. Be wise and provide for yourself friends now, that they may receive you into eternal habitations.

November 28th

Indulgences in Purgatory

We can gain for ourselves, and for the Holy Souls, Indulgences, varying from thirty days to thousands of years. Does this mean that our time in Purgatory will be shortened by this period? No; but that we shall be spared that amount of suffering which would have been involved in a corresponding period of the old canonical penances of the Church. What that amount of suffering is, we do not know. All we know is that each Indulgence brings with it some sort of relief. It may be that an Indulgence of a thousand years may only shorten our Purgatory by a few moments. We may gain Indulgences amounting to millions of years, yet still may have a period of Purgatory remaining.

What is meant by a Plenary Indulgence? It is one which brings with it a complete remission of the temporal punishment due to sin, if the person gaining it has perfect dispositions, and a hatred of sin corresponding to its hatefulness. But if the dispositions are imperfect, then it has only a partial effect. Hence we may gain many Plenary Indulgences, and yet have a large debt still to pay.

Are Indulgences always assigned to those for whom they are offered? Yes, they always bring them some benefit. Yet we are said to offer them by way of suffrage. Many theologians explain this as meaning that we ask God, if it be his good pleasure, to bestow them on this or that person, if not, on those more worthy. Our friends may gain many Plenary Indulgences for us after our death, without our being released. We must deserve them now, if we are to enjoy their full effect in Purgatory. Make a resolution to do more to aid the Holy Souls.

November 29th

How to help the Holy Souls in Purgatory

We should make it our practice to offer each day some special prayer or work for the Holy Souls. We may not do much, but by constancy in laboring on their behalf we shall gradually accumulate a treasure for their benefit. We should never miss saying a *de Profundis* for them every night, and we should offer up Holy Communion for them from time to time. In our morning oblation, we should pray that God may accept our labors, our sufferings, our penances for them.

We should also be careful to say as many Indulged Prayers as we can for them. Every prayer offered for them benefits them; every Indulged Prayer has a double efficacy. It has a satisfactory value in itself, and has a further power to obtain relief for them by reason of the Indulgence attached to it. In this way how much we may do for the Holy Souls!

There are some whom God inspires to make what is called the Heroic Act, by which they offer up the satisfaction of all their works, of the prayers and Masses said for them, and the Indulgences gained for them after their own death, to be bestowed on the Holy Souls according to our Lady's pleasure. This supreme act of self-sacrifice is indeed heroic, for it includes a willingness to remain in Purgatory as long as God shall please for the sake of helping others. What a great reward this will obtain in Heaven! What gratitude it will earn from the Holy Souls! Think how many souls need your help.

November 30th

The Termination of Purgatory

However long the sojourn in Purgatory, at last the day will come, the long-expected day, when the soul, released from its prison, will wing its way into the presence of God. O what a happy day that will be! No more suffering, no more separation from God, no more of the darkness and desolation which is the penalty of sin. The very remembrance of the agony that is past will make the present joy all the more joyful. How eagerly the soul will rush into the embraces of its God, when it knows that the stain is washed away, the debt paid, and that it can now appear without fault before Him, to enjoy forever the Beatific Vision!

That day will often come unexpectedly. Though the soul had been long waiting, it had not hoped for so speedy a release. It had looked for years of suffering still to come. and suddenly the chains fell from off it, the darkness turned to a glorious light, and an unspeakable joy filled its whole being, and in an instant it was in Heaven.

What had shortened the period of its Purgatory? God's love of joyful surprises: just when we least expect it. He turns sorrow and misery into joy and happiness; also the prayers offered for it upon earth, and the good works which it had done, and which now at length bore fruit to the glory of God and to its own consolation and joy. Our acts of charity, our alms, all that we do for God will hasten our release, and will earn for us intercessors who will come to welcome us when we enter on our eternal repose.

